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“SLAVEHOLDING NOT SINFUL:”

A REPLY

TO THE ARGUMENT OF REV. DR. HOW.

BY JOHN VAN DYKE, ESQ.

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TO THE REV. SAMUEL B. HOW, D. D.,

NEW-BRUNSWICK, NEW-JERSEY:

DEAR SIR,—

I have just examined the speech published in pamphlet form, entitled "SLAVEHOLDING NOT SINFUL," delivered by you before the Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church in New-York, in October 1855, on the subject of admitting a Classis from North Carolina into that body.

Had you been content with the expression of your views before the Synod on the particular subject then pending, I should simply have supposed that an excited zeal for the extension of the borders of the particular church to which you belong, had involuntarily led you into indiscreet and erroneous positions, which, upon calm reflection you would have hastened to retract, or at least to have let the subject slept in silence without further "agitation," and which would have rendered it unnecessary to do any thing more than to admire it as an elaborate and somewhat ingenious argument in favor of a bad cause. But, when after months of reflection, and amid much excitement on the subject in the country, we find you making that argument the basis of a laboriously prepared volume, with additions and improvements, apologizing for, supporting, sustaining, and giving aid and comfort, in all its length and breadth, to the shocking and loathsome system of human slavery as it exists in the United States; and when I see the book, thus filled with heresies, evasions and misapplications, with copyright secured, scattered far and wide over the land, by and among the friends of bondage and the foes of freedom, and sent forth as the orthodox sentiment of this community on the subject of which it treats, I feel that something should be done to counteract, if possible, the mischief so likely to follow such a publication.

Whatever you may have intended, you have in fact given your honored name and the best of your talents to the support and maintenance and perpetual duration of what you yourself admit to be "an evil much to lamented," — and which I do not hesitate to pronounce the blackest, foulest and most disgraceful stain which rests on the country of which we are so justly proud, and which we all love so well.

I am quite aware, that *in terms*, you say but little in favor of American Slavery *as such*. Your eulogies of the divine institution were confined mostly to the regions of Palestine; but no one can know better than you that it was not the slavery of Abraham and his descendants of which the Synod were afraid, and which its members were prepared to pronounce sinful. You must have known that the Synod were not war-

ring with the ghost of the miserable system of bondage practised among the Jews thousands of years ago, and which perished with their nation centuries gone by, under the terrific visitations of the Almighty, provoked by their numerous sins. You must have known, also, that it was the slavery of this country, over the disgusting exhibitions of which the stars and stripes of freedom float in mockery—the slavery that exists in North Carolina, and within the limits of the Classis seeking admission into the Dutch church—which that body shrunk from participating in. This, and this only, was the slavery which you defended so valiantly, for this was the only slavery in question—none other needed defence. It is true, that in making your onset upon the friends of freedom, you found it much easier to raise a false issue, than to defend the true one. The only question was in regard to American Slavery, but to defend this, I presume, seemed too Herculean an undertaking to attempt *directly*, and so you carefully threw over it the flimsy mantles of Abraham and Paul, and coolly transferred the scene of the conflict from the cotton fields and rice swamps, the slave pens, the auction blocks and whipping posts of the South, where it properly belonged, to the land of the olive and the vine, where the great ruler of the Universe, for reasons of his own, granted privileges to, and tolerated practices among, his peculiar and chosen people; not sanctioned anywhere else, before or since; and although it is extremely difficult to find any analogy between the two systems, except in a very doubtful use of the same term to designate them both, yet so adroitly have you presented your case, that if it had not been for certain *modern* expressions which you made use of, found only in the present pro-slavery vocabulary, we might, in fact, have been led into the impression that it was after all only the *ancient* slavery that you were justifying. But the term “Abolitionists,” to mention no other, as applied to your adversaries, is unmistakeable on the subject, and leaves no doubt as to your true position. This expression, with all the aid of “Cruden’s Concordance,” I could not find in the Scriptures. It is decidedly modern. It is the same that is used in derision and reproach by every rampant pro-slavery man in the South, and by every doughface of the North, to characterize all men, either North or South, who do not move quietly and submissively to the crack of the slavedrivers’ whip, who find no soothing music in the clank of hand-cuffs and chains with which men’s limbs are fettered, and who cannot raise a heartfelt hosanna to the fugitive slave law, nor praise it as the “perfection of human wisdom” and the *ne plus ultra* of humanity and benevolence.

I should be glad to believe that you had not condescended to use the term in this offensive sense, particularly in the presence in which you spoke, but the manner and connection in which you used it, leave but little chance for escape from the unfortunate and mortifying conclusion. And besides this, there is no party nor class of men who call themselves by this name. It is a designation given by others, and is used to caricature and reproach them in the absence of better arguments.

It was American slavery, then, and not Jewish slavery, that you was laboring to introduce into the Dutch church—which you not only

assert to be "without sin," but if your argument is sound, you prove to be without a stain. You unhesitatingly assert, not only that it is not sinful, not contrary to the Declaration of Independence, not contrary to the Constitution of the United States, not a crime against man, but is in every respect "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." I have not forgotten that you make the general remark that slavery is a great evil, but in its particulars you find nothing to condemn.

Now, my dear sir, what is this system of American slavery which receives such extravagant laudations at your hands? It is quite useless to tell us that the relation of master and slave *may* exist without sin, and without wrong. I do not doubt it. There are probably cases of the kind in New-Jersey, where old and worn out slaves are cast by the law of the land upon their master or his estate, for maintenance and support. Here the owner could not sever the relationship if he would, and if in that condition he cares for them properly, such relationship cannot be considered sinful, but such cases prove nothing, except that a slaveholder *may* be humane, and that the laws of the land may impose some obligations on him which he would be very glad to be free from.

But we must look at slavery in this country as it is, not as it might be made—at its origin, its practices, its incidents, its consequences and traffic—the laws by which it is sanctioned—not merely what slaveholders may do *contrary* to law, but what they may do *according* to law, in all the States of the Union where it is tolerated. Let us look at a few of these features and see if it is the pure and immaculate thing which you have described it to be, and which in your opinion should be taken, without further challenge, into the fraternal and affectionate embrace of the church of the world's Redeemer. Do not, I entreat you, be too anxious to get away to the "green shores of Jordan" for a resting-place and for ground on which to stand and fight the battle which you have voluntarily commenced—we shall probably get there soon enough for your argument—but patiently accompany me along the dreary shores and burning sands of unfortunate and down-trodden Africa. Thence between decks to this land of the free, but home of the *slave*; go with me to the slave-markets, and auction-blocks, and whipping-posts, and harems, and "slave-hells," established according to law. If you do not care to look upon the woolly-headed, and flat-nosed descendants of the "ebony kings," you may turn your attention to that more imposing Anglo-Saxon-African, with but a sixteenth of negro blood in his veins, with brow as broad, and heart as free, and skin as white, perhaps, as either of us; but he, too, is bound in helpless, hopeless, and eternal bondage—bound to labor and toil and sweat and waste his weary life out in ministering to the pleasures or profits of others—bound to be tortured and lashed and starved and sold and torn from home and friends and wife and children, at the will and caprice of the wretch whom the law makes his master. And if he attempt to gain the liberty to which by nature all men are entitled, not only his master with his minions and bloodhounds are upon his track, but the judiciary of the nation and the police force of the nation and the army of the nation

and the navy of the nation, and you and I sir, if commanded by the Marshal, at the peril of fine and imprisonment, concentrate our mighty energies upon this miserable fugitive, until he is “caught and caged,” and carried back to his inhuman tormentor, to be newly striped and scourged and chained and starved, until with crushed spirit and lacerated body, in the agony of despair he yields to his fate, without a friend who dares to sympathize with him, or a single ray of hope to cheer or relieve his desolate and miserable existence. This you maintain is neither sinful nor wrong, only “an evil greatly to be lamented.” But let us be a little more specific on this subject of American-Negro slavery.

First, then, it has its very origin in *man-stealing*. This may not be a sin at the present day, and it may not be contained in the eighth commandment, but I recollect that in the time of Moses and since, it was decidedly denounced and severely punished. Now, I presume, you will not contend that the negroes were originally the natives of this country, nor will it be pretended that they come here voluntarily. How, then, came they here in this enslaved condition? The answer every one knows. Our ancestors both of Europe and America went to Africa and stole them, brought them hither in chains and enslaved them. Or if they did not steal them themselves, for a trifle they bought them of those who did, knowing them to have been stolen. The receiver is as bad as the thief. We of this country received the stolen goods, knowing them to have been stolen. Whether, therefore, we stole them ourselves or obtained them of those who did, no matter how many degrees removed, our title is simply one of *larceny*. Deeply mortifying as this reflection is, and struggle though we may to evade and avoid the overwhelming fact, yet every effort and every struggle brings us back to the certain and undeniable conclusion, that the title of every slaveholder in the land to his human chattels is a title whose foundation rests in the blackest crime, and has been developed and carried out with a fiendish cruelty and outrage, with which the world has long been shocked—whilst the only right by which that title has been and still is maintained and enforced, is simply the right which power gives to the strong to oppress, crush and enslave the weak. Only this and nothing more. I know quite well, that the laws of the States can, and have rendered titles thus acquired perfectly *secure*, but a title conceived in sin and brought forth in the foulest iniquity, can never by long continuance nor by human laws be made *right*.

It may be said, however, that this traffic in human flesh has been long since prohibited. It is so when applied to the traffic between this country and Africa. It is now made piracy and punishable with death, but it is the basis of all our slave titles nevertheless; and yet the slave traffic is a necessary incident to slavery. The latter cannot exist without the former, and at this very day and hour, the traffic in human beings, which, when carried on between this country and Africa, is punished with death, is allowed to be carried on between the States of the Union, between Baltimore and Charleston, between Louisville, St. Louis and New Orleans with perfect impunity, accompanied by as many

frightful horrors as ever marked the African slave trade, and there is not a member of the Classis of North Carolina, who dares in his own pulpit to raise his voice against it. Is all this sinless?

Again, Is it sinful or is it not, to separate forever a husband and wife? You know it is perfectly *lawful* to do so in the slave States; and you know, also, that it is the daily practice, whenever it is the will of the master to do so, but is it sinless and right in the sight of either God or man? You, doubtless, when discharging the duties of a christian minister in the "Sunny South," joined many a male and female slave in what you then and there declared the holy bonds of matrimony. You invoked the divine blessing upon the union, and announced in the language of Omnipotence himself, "What therefore God has joined together let no *man* put asunder." I ask again, is it lawful in the sight of heaven, without cause, to sever unions thus created? Either such separations are highly criminal, or the Almighty takes no notice of the marriage of negroes, or else the above announcement of his is meaningless jargon—one or the other of these conclusions we cannot escape.

Again, Are adultery and fornication among slaves sinful, or are they not? We know they are perfectly lawful in that system, and for purposes of gain are encouraged by it. We know, also, that they are of constant occurrence, and no one presumes to call them in question.

But, further, while you hold I believe to the good old doctrine of election, you also hold, I think, to the necessity of man's working out, in some measure, his own salvation with fear and trembling. To enable us to do this, we are commanded to search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of the means of salvation. Is it right then, or is it not—is it a sin, or is it otherwise, for a master wholly to deprive his slaves of the channels through which salvation is to be sought, by obstinately depriving them of the means and capacity of searching the Scriptures? The laws of slavery not only justify this, but in all, or nearly so, of the slave States, they absolutely require it. There is probably not a slave State in the Union, where it is not made a crime to teach a slave to read. This you prove by a quotation in your own book, from a Southern publication.

Let me ask again, briefly, for I can do little more than refer to the numerous points, Is it right or is it wrong, for masters or any other white man, to hold the power of life and death over slaves? This is not wholly the case, but in certain very usual circumstances it is exactly true. A master or other white man may take the life of one or a dozen slaves or do them other injury, in the presence of a hundred other slaves, and no law can reach him, provided he was cautious enough not to commit the act in the presence of a white or free person—for no slave can be a witness in any case where a white man is a party. They are not only defenceless, but wholly without remedy at law.

Now, the points to which I have referred, are not merely isolated instances which occur but seldom, but they are of daily occurrence—they are part and parcel of the system. They are found wherever slavery is found, and are inseparable from it. The same laws that sustain

slavery sustain the crimes to which I have referred. They are not committed against law, but are done in accordance with it.

I will refer to but one other of the sins of slavery, and I do so because you have yourself introduced it. I mean the violation of the Saviour's Golden Rule—a palpable, wilful and unnecessary violation of which is a sin. This rule, by the aid of a most extraordinary interpretation, you cite in support of slavery. I certainly could not have believed that you had done so, if I had not read it in your published remarks. I did not suppose there could be two opinions as to its proper meaning. Though not a theologian by profession, I will venture to give my understanding of it. It clearly means to inculcate justice and fairness among men, and suggests the adoption of a rule which they would be willing should operate both ways. It applies of course to all lawful and proper desires and transactions, and not to unlawful and improper ones. It simply, but expressly requires that man in his dealings with his fellow man, should not knowingly exact any thing from him that he would be unwilling to yield, if the same were demanded of him under similar circumstances. That we should do no injury to, nor impose any burthens on, our brother man which we would be unwilling to receive from him; on the other hand, whatever we might lawfully and properly expect and desire from others, in circumstances of distress or otherwise, we should be willing to extend to them. If we are hungry, naked, sick, or heavily and unjustly oppressed, we would have a right to desire and expect relief from our neighbors, and should therefore be willing to extend the same favors to them if thus afflicted. The murderer or other criminal on trial has no *right* to ask or expect or desire the juror to acquit him if guilty; therefore the juror is not called upon by the rule to do so, on the ground that if he were the culprit, he “*would*” that the juror should acquit him, guilty though he was known and proved to be; consequently your list of instances of criminal applications for relief can have no proper application to the case. If they were meant to be embraced they must have been strangely overlooked in the announcement of the rule.

This injunction contains the very essence and soul of Christianity, and Christ himself adds in regard to it, “For this is the law and the prophets.”

How, then, does slaveholding as practiced here, violate this rule? We will take a common case, not extravagant either way, nor unusual. A man, no matter whether he professes to be Christian, Infidel, Mormon or Turk, desires the services of another to cultivate his fields, to drive his horses, to “fan him when he sleeps,” or for some other lawful purpose: instead of contracting with some one to perform the services and to pay him a reasonable compensation therefor, he betakes himself to the slave-ship, or the slave-market, or the auction-room, or somewhere else, where slaves are to be sold. He there finds a man in fetters, who has never harmed a human being in his life, and is guilty of no crime whatever, except that of being a negro, or partially so. He says nothing to the unfortunate victim, but of the man who claims to own him, he buys him. He carries him to his home and thus ad-

dresses him, "Now Onesimus, I have bought you. I am your master and you are my slave, my will is your supreme law. From morning until night you are to work for me, as long as you live. My orders are in all cases to be promptly obeyed. You are not to absent yourself from my service for an hour without my permission. If you disobey me or refuse to perform what I require of you, or in any other way seriously offend me, I shall flog you into submission, or if I cannot do it myself, the public authorities will help me. If you attempt to run away I will hunt you with bloodhounds, and the whole nation will assist me in retaking you." All these things the master has a perfect right to do and proceeds to carry them out, and actually does so without being considered guilty of any unnecessary cruelty.

Now, I assert that there breathes not a man on the face of this earth who would be willing to be treated thus, nor is there one so debased that could be compelled to submit to it, except from the most overwhelming necessity. No man, therefore, who acts thus towards his fellow man *can* be doing as he would have others do to him. He is consequently living in the daily wilful and unnecessary violation of the Saviour's rule, and as a matter of course in the daily practice of sin.

I will leave for a time the field of American slavery where man—

—finds his fellow guilty of a skin
Not colored like his own; and having power
T' enforce the wrong, for such a worthy cause,
Dooms and devotes him as a lawful prey,
Chains him and tasks him and exacts his sweat
With stripes, that mercy with a bleeding heart
Weeps when she sees inflicted on a beast—

and will examine as briefly as possible the ground of your *justification* of slaveholding. I think that I neither mistake nor misrepresent your position, when I say, that your justification of slaveholding in this country, is based entirely and exclusively on the fact, that slaveholding, as it was practised among the Hebrews, was never directly condemned by God himself, nor by any one who it is conceded spoke by his authority; on the contrary, as you contend, it received their sanction.

In the first place, it is not shown that there is any considerable analogy between the two systems. The Hebrews held bondmen, some from among their own people, and some from among the nations which surrounded them, but they had no such thing as negro slavery. They had no nation or race of men about them doomed to slavery as a matter of course, on account of their nation and race—although the descendants of Ham existed then as well as now. Their bondmen from among their own people, answered somewhat to modern apprenticeships, as they could only be held for a limited time, and the enslaving of their ungodly heathen neighbors had its origin, probably, in the practice of all nations in former times, Jews and heathens, of subjecting to slavery prisoners of war; a practice long since condemned and abandoned as too inhuman to be longer tolerated. And as the peculiar people of God were allowed to conquer and subdue the nations about them generally, they doubtless had many such prisoners, as well as

their heathen neighbors; but as all were not captors, those who were not, if they owned any of these slaves, had to buy them somewhere, consequently some of them owned servants “*that were bought with their money.*”

But suppose we admit for the sake of the argument, that the Almighty, for reasons of his own, permitted slavery among his chosen people without reproof, does it follow as a matter of course that *we* can, without sin, practice the same thing? Why, half the sins mentioned in the decalogue can be justified on the same pretense. Abraham seems to be your model slaveholder. God does not seem to have approved or disapproved of his holding servants, and only interfered with the relation between them so far as to require Abraham to circumcise his servants so as to bring them, like himself, within the covenant. But you should have gone further with the faithful Abraham, and should have told us that he not only had men servants whom he circumcised, but that he had a female slave also, Hagar, by whom, in the lifetime of his wife, he had an illegitimate child, without ever having been censured or reproved for it by the Almighty; but will you undertake to reason from this that the patriarchs of the present day, the great heads of the church here, may now do the same thing and be innocent, on the ground that Abraham was allowed to do so without disapprobation? Why not this, as well as the other? Perhaps, however, this was considered only “an evil,” and not a sin, and the practice of Abraham in this respect seems to be considered a good and safe precedent by many of our slaveholding masters of the present day. He also had concubines and had children by them without reproof, but can this furnish any pretense for a justification of the same thing now? Abraham, moreover, was guilty of falsehood by twice denying his wife, or if she was in fact his sister, as he said, then he was guilty of incest. This must have been known to the all-wise Jehovah, yet so far from condemning it, not only the chosen people, but the Messiah himself, was made to spring from this union; but can this furnish any apology for incest at the present day?

Again, It seems that the Israelites, after their deliverance from Egypt, were permitted and required to kill, to destroy and drive out the nations and tribes inhabiting the land of Canaan, with whom they had no quarrel, and to possess their lands, with an apparent cruelty and inhumanity with which every reader must be shocked. The Almighty does not seem to have disapproved of any of these things, but to have commanded them. But can it be fairly inferred from this that we may, without just cause, invade Canada, Mexico, Central or South America, or the Sandwich Islands, slaughter and destroy the inhabitants, possess and enjoy their lands as our own, and innocently justify our conduct by turning to the Scriptures and there finding it recorded that the descendants of Jacob did the same thing in the land of Canaan, without incurring the divine disapprobation? I am inclined to admit that we too are rather a “peculiar” people, but I cannot think we can do such things now without incurring the Divine displeasure.

It seems, too, that many of the wisest and best men among the Jews,

of whom the Bible gives us any account, were men addicted to polygamy, concubinage, and many other offences now deemed sinful. Among the number were Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and others, who so far from being reproved by Providence for their conduct, were on the contrary chosen, some of them, as the inspired channels of communication between God and man.

Now, you can no more prove the correctness of Jewish bondage even, by the Scriptures, than you can prove the correctness of the other practices to which I have referred. All seem to be alike approved, none of them seem to have been disapproved. All the explanation we can give, is that they were his peculiar and chosen people, who, for reasons of his own, he permitted to act as they did.

Such was not the Divine pleasure, however, when the Israelites were enslaved and oppressed. When a certain king arose in Egypt "that knew not Joseph," and began to oppress the descendants of Jacob, and persisted in His refusal to let them go, for their sakes the land was infested with frogs and lice and flies and locusts, enveloped in darkness, and smitten with hail and the death of the first born, and in the final destruction of the king and his armies in the Red Sea, all because of the cruel bondage in which His people were held. I am aware that there was a great end in view here, and so there was throughout the entire history of that people; hence God's dealings with them were different from all others, and cannot be pleaded by us as a justification for crime and outrage.

A few words, now, on the New Testament part of your argument. My reply is very much the same as to the other part. All you have proved or can prove from the New Testament, are the facts that servitude was found to exist in those times, that neither Christ nor any of his apostles in direct terms condemned the institution, but on the contrary admonished those connected therewith, either as master or servant, to perform with faithfulness the duties which the laws of the institution required. It is not pretended that they approved of it in any other way than this.

It is a sufficient answer to all that has been or can be said on this subject, that neither Christ nor any of his apostles ever attempted to interfere with any of the *legal* institutions of the country. They never preached rebellion against the laws, nor resistance to the constituted authorities. The language of Christ was "render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's." Servitude, such as it was, was an institution established and protected by law as much as marriage or any other; and the laws of those times and that place, be it remembered, were not as here made by the people themselves, who claim to denounce and alter them at pleasure, but they were made up of the edicts of emperors and kings, and to speak against them was to incur the penalties of treason. When all the world was to be taxed, the decree of Augustus was all that was necessary, and the advocates of a kingdom not of this world, were too wise to obstruct their moral mission among men, and their access to the heart and conscience, by stirring up sedition and revolt against the laws of the

Herods and the Cæsars. Their mission would doubtless have been brought to a speedy close by such a course. Foes beset them on every side, watching for an opportunity to entrap them into some violation of the civil laws, consequently they carefully abstained from all legal matters calculated to subject them to the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate, deeming some things “not expedient,” and preferring rather to be “all things to all men,” the better thereby to accomplish their divine mission; and yet the sublime morality of the doctrines which they taught, of justice and righteousness, humanity and benevolence, of peace on earth and good will to men, as well as the meek, humble, lowly and self-denying lives which they led, were calculated to abolish every wrong and every “evil”—even that of holding their fellow-men in bondage. The nation which rejected their doctrines has long since perished, but the great truths themselves still abide, and before their quiet but resistless advance the stupendous “evil” is being everywhere swept away, leaving but little of it in Christendom, except in the decayed despotism of old Spain, the torrid empire of Brazil, and a portion of this liberty-loving country.

Christ himself, I believe, never alluded to the subject of bondage, except in illustration of something else. The apostles occasionally exhorted husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants to submit patiently to the condition in which they found themselves under the law, and faithfully to comply with its requirements, and in this way they referred to the subject, without either approbation or disapprobation. You do not pretend, however, that they ever directly approved of what you term slavery, but your whole argument is, that inasmuch as they knew of it, and spoke of it, and did not condemn it, therefore they *must* have approved it. It is not probable that either of them approved of the Roman dominion over Judea, and the taxes to which the people were subjected to support the imperial tyranny, yet they never condemned it, consequently they *must* have approved it. It cannot be doubted that there were many laws and practises introduced and enforced in Palestine after its conquest by Pagan Rome, which Christ and his apostles mentally condemned, but as it does not appear that they ever said so publicly, therefore we are bound to suppose that they *must* have heartily approved of them. What strange logic this seems to be, and yet without it you have no case at all.

But you seem to have made one other discovery, new, if not useful, more strange if possible than the others, and that is, that the “abolitionists” of the General Synod are utterly crushed and confounded by the command “Thou shall not *covet* thy neighbor’s man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor any thing that is thy neighbor’s,” which you accompany with a dissertation on the rights of property; but what this has to do with the case is more than I can tell. Which of the abolition members of the Synod, or of any other body, think you, *coveted* the slaves, of either the Classis of North Carolina, or elsewhere. To *covet*, as I understand it, is the ardent desire to own or possess a thing; now you certainly know as well as any one else, that although the “abolitionists” desire the freedom of the slaves, they have no desire to own

or possess them themselves. The pirate, the bandit, the burglar, the robber and the forger, all have and own what they call "property," and property too, of which we should all be glad to see them deprived, but do we *covet* that property? I heard of a gentleman not far from our City, whose house was entered by burglars. Through the daring and courageous conduct of his son, the burglars were arrested and carried to prison. On examination, they were found in the possession, among other "property," of two pistols, loaded to the muzzles. Although the gentleman was very indignant at the sight of these, and had the miscreants instantly deprived of them, and from fear of a repetition of the offence went immediately and purchased a pair of his own, yet I never learned nor supposed that he ever *coveted* those of the burglars.

You labor at much length to show that the condition of the slaves among the Jews was much better than among any other people. I do not doubt it, and it accounts for its toleration among them at all; for sure I am, that if the inhuman, debasing and demoralizing practices which prevail and are tolerated under the shield of the slave laws of this country, had been enacted in the land where the Saviour denounced oppression and preached deliverance to the captive, such practices would have been discontinued—but how this strengthens your argument in favor of the *American* "evil," I do not see.

Under three separate heads you propose to give us the "REASONS FOR THE PERMISSION OF SLAVERY," and although you have discussed them at length, you have given us no reason whatever, for either the original institution of servitude, or for the permission of it after it was introduced. Like thousands of other "evils" which Providence *might* have prevented, but did not, it made its way into the world; and like all other "evils" which Providence *might* abolish and does not, but *permits* to exist, this overshadowing one of slavery is still allowed to shroud over, with its sable pall, the fair face of more than half our country—producing misery, degradation and crime, idleness, cruelty, decay and moral leprosy, wherever its haughty and dictatorial spirit is recognized and submitted to.

You give some good reasons for the *regulating* and restraining of the system among the Jews as an existing institution, but you give none for its *permission*. For this I do not blame you, for I am well aware that none can be found. These reasons for regulating the "evil" exist with all their force in this country, but alas! the regulations themselves are nowhere to be found.

One of the reasons which you furnish for the regulation of the system among the Jews is, that the bondmen of that country should not be excluded from the privileges of Christianity, but on the contrary were expressly required to be brought within its pale, thus putting them in this respect on an equal footing with the most exalted in the land; but who pretends that the same state of things exists here? Another reason was that they might be protected against the cruelty of those who exercised dominion over them. You kindly furnish us with the Hebrew authority, that "if a man smite the eye of his man-servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish, he shall let him go free for the

eye's sake; and if he smite out his man-servant's tooth or his maid-servant's tooth, he shall let him go free for the tooth's sake;" but sad to say, the poor, powerless, friendless slave of this "glorious Union," has no such protection from the law. The master or his minions may smite out one of his eyes or both of them—he may smite out one of his teeth or all of them—he may lacerate his body and break his bones—humanity may give a spasmodic shudder, but the victim is still his slave forever.

It is fair to presume, that another of the regulations of Jewish servitude was the right of the servant to leave the service of his master when cruelly treated; or if it was not strictly their right so to do, yet that they had no commissioners, nor marshals, nor fugitive slave laws there, through whose intervention they were to be returned to bondage. You find but two cases in the Scriptures of what you term "fugitive slaves," and I presume these are all—Hagar and Onesimus. We do not learn that either Abraham or Philemon, the masters, ever pursued these slaves, or attempted through others to recapture them, and although both returned, yet neither of them did so by coercion of the law or any of its officers. Hagar returned by direction of the Angel, because the child to which she was to give birth was to be of the seed of Abraham. He was to be the father of a great nation, to be circumcised like the rest of Abraham's family, and he was to "dwell in the presence of all his brethren." These things would have been frustrated if the child had been born and perished in the wilderness whither Hagar had fled. The Angel accordingly directed her to return to a place of safety, which she did.

Onesimus, you inform us, "ran away from his master," but how you find this out, I am at a loss to know. You certainly do not find it in Paul's epistle to Philemon. How he became separated from Philemon, if he ever belonged to him, we are not informed; whether he was the slave or servant of Philemon is left entirely to conjecture. Paul certainly does not call him by any such name, he simply calls him his son, nor did he send him back as a "slave." He expressly says that he does *not* send him back "as a servant, but *above* a servant, a brother beloved." He also adds, that if he, Onesimus, "had wronged him, or owed him ought," he, Paul, would pay it, not to exact it from Onesimus. He was now a converted Christian, and was to be thenceforth, not the servant or slave of any man, but a laborer in the cause of Christ.

If Onesimus was a slave in the sense for which you are contending, then you must accuse Paul of harboring a "fugitive slave." How long he had been with him does not exactly appear; but, judging from the circumstances, it must have been some time, and Paul seems at one time to have contemplated the retaining of him altogether.

But all these favorable aspects of Hebrew servitude, only bring us back with increased force to the unanswered and unanswerable question. Admitting, even, that the system of Hebrew servitude, regulated as it was by some just laws, and guarded as the servants were against undue oppression, and for reasons founded in the great designs of Providence, was not sinful, how can that justify the hideous curse which hangs over this country? Commenced in crime, carried out in the most

merciless cruelty, spreading blight, mildew and decay over the land of its victims,—constantly threatening dissolution, violence and civil war among the States, and making the entire nation a bye-word and a reproach in the face of the civilized world.

It is useless to tell me that masters are kind, and that the slaves are happy and contented. Their contentment is shown by the thousands who every year brave every hardship and every danger in making their escape from bondage, men destroying their own lives, and mothers slaughtering their helpless and innocent children rather than have them subjected to slavery, and this too, in the States where the "evil" exists in its mildest form.

Masters kind and humane, forsooth! Yes, I presume they are at times, many of them perhaps always so, but we know too well what becomes of kindness and humanity when passion and power are united together—when both are unrestrained, and the occasion arises for their exercise. The chances for kindness and humanity with masters who practically deny all human nature to their slaves, and view them only in the light of "property," as you seem to do, are but slender indeed. The man loves his horse and cares for him kindly and humanely so long as he wins every race, passes every vehicle on the road, and never faints nor flags under the most exhausting trials; but let him once refuse to draw the load that is placed behind him, then we have an illustration of kindness and humanity quite equal to the slaveholders. The man loves his dog with quite an affectionate attachment so long as he scents the game and points to its whereabouts with unerring certainty; but let him by accident once "flush" the bird before his master is ready, and he will flog him within an inch of his life. So the man may like and kindly treat his slave, so long as with the most unfaltering and unwavering faithfulness he ministers to his every want, wish, whim and caprice; but let him once fail to do so, and he fares no better than the favorite horse and the dog.

Your impressions of the humanity of the slave system in this country are in some measure founded, no doubt, on your experience in the South. This is quite natural, but I fear you have allowed it to mislead you. You are doubtless aware that even here we all lay aside our vices and crimes and put on our best behavior in the presence of "the dominie." So in the South, no man ever carried his slave in your presence to be lashed, or to have the thumb-screw applied—no one ever bared the striped back of his slave for your inspection. None voluntarily made you a witness to the ruthless separation of husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, to meet again, never! No one ever carried you to the negro nursery where human chattels are reared for the market, like horses and cattle and swine. The fact, therefore, that you never saw any of these things, should not lead you to conclude that they do not exist.

I, too, have seen something of this peculiar institution in the South. I have seen the Capital of the nation desecrated by having a drove of negroes of all ages, sexes and conditions, bound together and driven along its principal streets to a railroad depot, whence they were to be

transported further South. I have entered, too, the slave-pens, where hundreds of human beings of all aspects and conditions, and of almost all colors, bought up in the surrounding country, were literally huddled together like cattle, sheep and swine, preparatory to their being sent to the cotton fields and sugar plantations down the river. I have stood, too, by the auction-block and seen parents and children sold like other beasts of burden, to the highest bidder, no matter who he might be, to be carried by him whithersoever he might think proper, and to be subjected without restraint to whatever hardship and cruelty his whim or malice might suggest or invent.

But why proceed with horrors so deeply disgraceful to our nation—horrors with which millions are but too familiar—horrors which thousands will not raise a finger to mitigate, and horrors which not a few, even here, are prepared to justify and defend.

The beneficial effects of Christianity on slaveholding, to which you refer, I do not, of course, deny, and shall not discuss. It is well that it is so, for if slavery be so great an “evil,” with all the mitigating influences of Christianity upon it, God only can tell what it would be without it; but this is nothing in favor of a system scarcely durable with such an influence. I pass by, also, for the present, the political aspects of slavery. Whether it is contrary to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, whether it is a crime against human nature or not, and how we may get rid of it, are matters which I will reserve for a future occasion if need be.

As you have delivered your argument twice, and written it out once, you will not care, probably, to travel over the same ground again; but if at the next General Synod you shall think proper to discuss the other features of the peculiar and patriarchal institution, I may find it expedient to continue the subject.

Very respectfully, I am your friend and obedient servant,
JOHN VAN DYKE.



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